A

SERMON,

PREACHED

(BY DESIRE)

IN THE

Church of St. *Magnus the Martyr, London Bridge,*

ON SUNDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 30, 1792;

AT A

LECTURE

PREPARATORY TO

THE LORD's SUPPER.

By VICESIMUS KNOX, D.D.

MASTER OF TUNBRIDGE SCHOOL, AND LATE FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD.

PRINTED AT THE REQUEST OF THE HEARERS,

AND PRESENTED TO THEM

FEBRUARY 8, 1794.

A

DEDICATION.

To Mr. WILLIAM CHILD,
Churchwarden of Saint
Magnus the Martyr;
Mr. JAMES SMITH,
Mr. THOMAS MAY,
Mr. COLES CHILD,
Mr. WILLIAM SUTHERLAND,
Mr. JAMES DAVIDSON,
Mr. THOMAS GREEN,
Mr. WILLIAM S. HALL,
Mr. WILLIAM M^cANDREW,
Mr. JOSEPH THORNHILL,
Mr. JAMES NORTON,
Mr. CHARLES BARTRUM,
Mr. THOMAS THOMPSON,
Mr WILLIAM CHAPLIN,
Mr. JOHN SUTHERLAND,
Mr. JAMES KINGSTONE,
Mr. RICHARD TILL,
Mr. CRUTTAL PIERCE,
Mr. JAMES M^cANDREW,
Inhabitants of the ſaid pariſh,

To Mr. JAMES FILES,
Mr. JOHN BURGON,
Churchwardens of Saint
Margaret, New Fiſh
Street;
Mr. WILLIAM CURLING,
Mr. HENRY BAMFORD,
Mr. THOMAS DUNN,
Mr. THOMAS JONES,
Mr. JOHN BAYLISS,
Mr. EDWARD DAVIS,
Mr. PETER DOBREE,
Inhabitants of the ſaid pariſh.

GENTLEMEN,

HAVING received in the courſe of the laſt month a REQUISITION, ſigned by YOU, expreſſing, in the handſomeſt terms, your approbation of a Sermon preached by me, more than a year ago, at the requeſt of Mr. WILLIAM CHILD, the worthy Churchwarden of St. *Magnus*, and at the ſame time deſiring

ſiring me, with a friendly importunity, to PRINT IT; I comply with pleaſure, and beg leave to dedicate and preſent it to you with ſentiments of the ſincereſt reſpect and gratitude for your good opinion.

Permit me to aſſure you, that I had no intention to *print* the Sermon, when I wrote and preached it, and that it is not now printed for publication, but merely in compliance with your requeſt, and to multiply copies of it for your more convenient peruſal.

This Sermon is probably the laſt which I ſhall be able to addreſs to you from the ſame PULPIT. But I ſhall never ceaſe to entertain a due ſenſe of your candour, and to wiſh you all happineſs, preſent and future.

I am, Gentlemen,

With the greateſt regard,

Your obliged humble ſervant,

TUNBRIDGE,
February 6, 1794.

V. KNOX.

A SERMON, &c. &c.

2 CHRON. XXX. part of the 18th and 19th Verſes.

The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth *his* HEART *to ſeek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleanſed according to the purification of the ſanctuary.*

FOR the particular occaſion of theſe words, I muſt refer you to the chapter in the ſacred hiſtory from which they were ſelected. I have choſen them as introductory to the ſubject on which we are aſſembled to meditate, the SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER, OR THE CHRISTIAN'S SACRIFICE.

Whoever takes a comprehenſive view of mankind as deſcribed either in hiſtory, or in the

voyages of circumnavigators, will be ſtruck with the univerſality of SACRIFICIAL RITES, and the *ſhedding of the blood of brutes, to atone for human tranſgreſſion.* Wonderful, yet uniform perſuaſion, that the ſlaughter of animals ſhould contribute to appeaſe the wrath of an offended Deity! an opinion, at which common ſenſe revolts, and philoſophy is diſguſted: yet we ſee it prevailing at early periods in all nations; not only in the barbarous and rude, but in the poliſhed, the lettered, the humane. We trace its veſtiges from the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, even to the natives of the newly-diſcovered iſlands in the Pacific Ocean *. Reaſon alone, with all her penetrating ſagacity, cannot explain this aſtoniſhing phænomenon, and relinquiſhes her reſearches in deſpair. Profane learning is foiled in her inveſtigation of it, ſcience acknowledges herſelf perplexed, logic denies its rationality, metaphyſics are wrapt in tenfold darkneſs; but RELIGION draws aſide the veil, and truth advances in her native luſtre. Religion humbly ſeeks, and joyfully finds the cauſe of inexplicable appearances, whether in the world

* See a very ſtriking account of a *human ſacrifice* in the voyages of Captain Cook.

of

of grace, the world of morals, or the world of nature; in the GREAT FIRST CAUSE.

After all that has been argued on the ſubject, it is certain that the ſacrifice of animals is of *divine inſtitution*. Every believer in the Scriptures muſt acknowledge with reverence, that it is the ordinance of God. At the promulgation of the Law, and in the twenty-fourth verſe of the twentieth chapter of Exodus, God himſelf condeſcended to give particular directions concerning the altar and the ſacrifices, *An altar of earth*, ſays he, *thou ſhalt make unto me, and ſhalt ſacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy ſheep and thy oxen.* And his meſſage to Pharaoh by Moſes was, *Let my people go, that they may* SACRIFICE *to the Lord, their God.*

Since then this inſtitution originated in the command of the all-wiſe and beneficent God, we may reſt aſſured that it was not without its uſe, even if we could not diſcover it. It comes from God, it is therefore wiſe. But we may venture to *conjecture* its beneficial purpoſe.

The ſacrifice of animals, according to the opinion of learned and judicious divines, was deſigned to anſwer theſe three ends: Firſt, to repreſent to MAN, in a moſt forcible manner, the *forfeiture of life* which he had incurred:

ſecondly, to ſignify God's gracious condeſcenſion in accepting a SUBSTITUTE: and thirdly, to prefigure that great and availing Subſtitute, which in the fulneſs of time was to be offered, even JESUS CHRIST.

In this *great Sacrifice* all men were deeply intereſted; and *ſacrifices* therefore became a part of the UNIVERSAL RELIGION. In ſome mode, or at ſome period, all nations have adopted them. Previouſly to the exiſtence or the diffuſion of BOOKS, all religion was preſerved in the world by rites, ceremonies, types, ſigns, and hieroglyphics; and the Sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous, was ſhadowed out by the ſacrifice of the innoxious beaſts of the field, the playful goat from the mountain, the innocent lamb from the ſhepherd's fold, and the placid bullock from the green paſture. But when men began to forget the true and only God, the *reaſon of the inſtitution* was forgotten alſo; though the *external rite*, the outward, viſible, ceremonious part of it, the *ſlaughter*, and the *offering of animals on the altar*, remained from age to age. A CEREMONY, the palpable object of the *ſenſes*, was eaſily retained, long after the doctrine or intention of it, an object of the underſtanding too refined for

the intellect of Barbarians, and ſoon diſregarded by Polytheiſts and Idolaters, was loſt in total oblivion; and the unenlightened inhabitant of the South Sea iſles is to this day *ſhedding the blood* of his harmleſs quadruped, and ſometimes even of HIS FELLOW-CREATURE, in compliance with a traditionary opinion, to appeaſe the rudely ſculptured block which he worſhips, though he knows nothing of the cauſe, the deſign, and the original inſtitution of animal ſacrifices. Poor child of nature! the day ſpring from on high has not yet viſited thee; and thou continueſt ſhedding blood, emblematic of the death of that Jeſus Chriſt, whoſe croſs, it is to be hoped, will one day be fixed on thy ſhores—a more glorious ſtandard than the banner, ſtained with blood, that waves in heatheniſh triumph over thy ſequeſtered iſle. Child of nature! may'ſt thou ſoon become the child of grace, enlightened by Chriſtian knowledge, warmed with Chriſtian charity, and an aſpirant at a happy reſurrection!

On our iſland, bleſſed be God, the day ſpring from on high has long beamed with glorious luſtre. We know that Jeſus Chriſt, the Lamb of God, has been ſacrificed for us. No longer is it neceſſary among *us* to ſlaughter animals,

animals, to ſhed the blood of bulls and goats, prefigurative of that myſterious diſpenſation. We know that our Redeemer, after having been ſacrificed for the ſins of the world, liveth to make interceſſion for us at the right hand of God. Sacrifice of ſheep and oxen is therefore aboliſhed, as no longer neceſſary.

But there yet remains a SACRIFICE, differing from the other only as the morning and the evening ſhadow, as the type and the antitype. Though a prefigurative rite, a prophetic or typical ſacrifice, be no longer required of us, yet a commemorative, emblematic, and expiatory one is ordained by Jeſus Chriſt, in perpetual remembrance of himſelf; a bloodleſs rite, an oblation of piety and charity, the SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

To this happy commemoration, this feaſt of love, we are now invited; *therefore will we keep the feaſt; therefore will we waſh our hands in innocency, and ſo will we go to the altar.*

In innocence, ſaid I? Alas! if perfect innocence be neceſſary, who among us ſhall preſume to attend the Sacrifice? Yet the command is abſolute. THIS DO, ſays the Author and Finiſher of our faith; THIS DO, *in remembrance of me.* Then muſt we, with all humility, have recourſe to the text, and ſay,

The

The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his HEART *to ſeek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleanſed according to the purification of the ſanctuary.*

But ſince the receiving the Sacrament appears to be attended with danger, is it not prudent, a cautious man may aſk, to avoid the Lord's table entirely? But whither, poor mortal, with all thy caution, whither wouldſt thou fly, to eſcape danger? A ſtate of ſin is always a ſtate of danger, and likely to become much more ſo, to thoſe who *avoid* the *means of grace.* That a ſinner ſhould *avoid* what is expreſsly commanded by Heaven, as the beſt means of eſcaping the ſin and danger that beſets him, is no more reaſonable, than to refuſe liberty, *becauſe* we are priſoners; to avoid medicine, *becauſe* we are ſick; to reject a donation, *becauſe* we are poor. The Sacrament is inſtituted, *becauſe* we are ſinners; and for that reaſon ſhall we refuſe to partake of it? We wiſh to be cleanſed from our leproſy, yet, like Naaman, ſhall we refuſe to waſh in the waters of Iſrael?

One of the prophets, predicting the happy time of the Goſpel, ſays, "In that day there "ſhall be a FOUNTAIN opened to the houſe "of David, and to the inhabitants of Jeruſa-

"lem,

"lem, for ſin and for uncleanneſs *." That fountain flows in *copious* and pellucid ſtreams from the foot of the altar. Waſh, therefore, ſinners, and be clean; if ye were immaculate and pure before, you would have no occaſion for the divine *luſtration*. But who is pure in the ſight of God? *He charges his angels with folly; yea, the heavens are not clean in his ſight!*

Abſolute purity is certainly not compatible with the preſent ſtate of human nature. We are all ready to acknowledge our infirmity, though not equally inclined to ſeek ſupport where alone it is to be found. There is ſomething of humility, and ſomething of pious fear, in our reluctance or delay to come to the altar, which entitles it to tenderneſs. But let it be remembered, that to *deſire* purity, to *endeavour* to promote it, to *aim* at Chriſtian perfection, though we ſhould never attain unto it, is alone a ſufficient preparation. Purity improved, as far as our natural infirmity will admit, by GRACE, is the EFFECT of going to the altar, not the neceſſary and previous qualification. That high and extraordinary degree of goodneſs,

* Zech. xiii. 1.

which

which ſome men rigidly require of themſelves to fit them for the Sacrament, is not to be obtained, if obtained at all, but as the happy *conſequence* of it. It may, by the bleſſing of God, *follow*, but it is not indiſpenſably neceſſary to *precede*. It is the END to be purſued, and cannot therefore be the MEANS.

The GREAT QUESTION which concerns us all is ſimply this: *Whether the partaking of the body and blood of Chriſt is neceſſary to ſalvation, abſolutely neceſſary, ſo certainly neceſſary that without it we cannot entertain rational hopes of being ſaved?* Every man, high or low, rich or poor, is more deeply intereſted in this queſtion, than in all thoſe cares which agitate the buſy world in the tumultuous purſuits of avarice or ambition.

Such is the queſtion, and let him who inſtituted the Sacrament anſwer it. Hear him, all ye people. Conſider his words, and form your own concluſions: "EXCEPT," ſays he, "YE EAT THE FLESH OF THE SON OF "MAN, AND DRINK HIS BLOOD, YE HAVE "NO LIFE IN YOU."

Such the queſtion, and ſuch the anſwer. Pauſe and ponder them. They require no comment. The queſtion is plain, and the anſwer peremptory. Can any one pretend to

be a Chriſtian, who, after hearing theſe words of our Saviour, continues in a wilful, conſtant, preſumptuous neglect of the Lord's Supper? If you believe not what our Saviour himſelf ſays of the Sacrament, you are not a Chriſtian; for you have not *faith in* CHRIST. If, on the other hand, you believe his words, the unavoidable inference is, that you *muſt* of neceſſity obey them. You will not dare to diſregard a poſitive command at the hazard of your immortal ſoul. Hear the voice of the Redeemer once more: "*If any man* "*eat of this bread, he ſhall live for ever. He* "*that eateth me, ſhall live by me. Whoſo* "*eateth my fleſh and drinketh my blood, hath* "*eternal life.*" Can any words be more clearly and ſtrongly declaratory? Though plain and brief, they are yet more convincing than the laboured perſuaſives of the moſt eloquent inſtructor. You muſt unavoidablyinfer from them, that to receive the Sacrament is generally neceſſary to ſalvation. What favourable exceptions God in his mercy may make, it is not ours to determine. But ſuch, I believe, is the ſound doctrine; and I have, as in duty bound, plainly laid it before you. It is not ſupported by *my* words, but the words of Jeſus Chriſt. Conſider them deliberately at

home, meditate on their importance as you repoſe on your pillow, in the ſilent hour of night, when the world is ſhut out, and you commune, uninterrupted by its diſtractions, with your God and your conſcience.

And ſurely it is an eaſy ſervice. What does the Lord require of thee, but to unite in a *community of charity with your fellow-creatures, and of ſpiritual intercourſe* with your Maker, your Judge, and your Redeemer? What then remains, but that they who have hitherto proceeded from year to year, in the neglect of this ordinance, lay aſide their careleſs ſecurity, diſmiſs their ſcruples, and prepare to receive at the firſt opportunity? Always remembering, that as our animal food, our daily meals, would not nouriſh our bodies without a vital energy in the internal parts, without life and warmth in the organs of the ſtomach; ſo neither will this ſacramental food produce ſpiritual growth, health, and immortal life, without a quickening ſpirit within, an aſſimilating power in the heart; that is, without faith, hope, charity, and repentance.

But you *are afraid* of being an UNWORTHY receiver. You love God and man; you aſpire at all goodneſs; but in the delicacy of your apprehenſions, you *are afraid* of being an unworthy partaker of theſe holy myſte-

ries. Your timidity is reſpectable. It ſhews that you are feelingly alive to the impulſes of conſcience. But be perſuaded, that nothing can render us entirely unworthy of coming to the Sacrament, but a reſolution to *continue* unworthy. A ſenſe of unworthineſs, inſtead of deterring, ſhould lead us to the altar. A ſenſe of unworthineſs, with a ſincere deſire of becoming *leſs unworthy*; a thankful remembrance of the death of Chriſt, love and charity for all mankind, I firmly believe, but humbly aſſert, are ſufficient qualifications for receiving the holy Sacrament, without the ſeverity of a rigorous preparation. The ſacrifice of the wicked is, indeed, abomination to the Lord; but wickedneſs, remember, is as odious to God in the porch as in the chancel, in the pew as at the altar, at your fire-ſides as in the Sanctuary; and if you are *truly and indeed* unqualified to come to the Sacrament, you are at the ſame time unqualified to come to divine ſervice, and, it is to be feared, are not in a ſtate of ſalvation.

But ſince to receive the Sacrament is ſo evidently neceſſary, and the qualifications ſo eaſily attainable, conſiſting only in honeſt intentions, virtuous purpoſes, pious ſentiments, kind affections, and beneficent actions,

actions, how happens it, that few, in compariſon with the great numbers of neglectful profeſſors of Chriſtianity, *accuſtom* themſelves to come at the periodical and ſtated times to the Supper of the Lord? Many, I know, are careleſs of all that concerns their ſpiritual ſtate; engroſſed by worldly purſuits; eagerly chacing bubbles coloured by fancy, and neglecting ſubſtantial good; and for ſuch no excuſe, I fear, will be received as a ſufficient apology. Others are willing, indeed, to go, but that there is a lion in the way. Their wiſhes are virtuous, but their hearts are appalled by thoſe frightful words, the danger of eating and drinking our own damnation; words improperly tranſlated, and commonly miſunderſtood; words, in their genuine ſenſe, applicable to the *Corinthians only*, who ſat down to the Lord's table as to a common feaſt, to indulge in luxury, gluttony, and every kind of intemperance. No reverence did they diſplay, no religious awe, no humility, no purity, and, it is to be feared, little charity. Riot, debauchery, and unchriſtian broils, were the probable conſequences of ſuch a banquet, on an occaſion, when every thing that is pure and peaceable ought to have given the beſt reliſh, and to have HALLOWED THE FEAST OF LOVE.

But

But the decency of ſacramental rites in modern times precludes among *us* the poſſibility of ſuch offences as rendered the banquet of the *Corinthians* poiſonous to the partakers of it, and offenſive to him whoſe favour it was deſigned to propitiate. Silence, devotion, and decorum, preſide at our ſacred table. Under ſuch circumſtances we cannot offend as the Corinthians offended; and therefore need not apply to ourſelves the formidable words which were addreſſed ſolely to *them*, and are now ſcarcely applicable to any ſerious profeſſors throughout Chriſtendom. Let us not imagine that we are invited by our gracious Father in Heaven to his Holy Supper, like the wretch recorded in hiſtory, who ſat down to a tyrant's banquet, with a ſword over his head, ſuſpended by a ſingle hair.

No; the GOOD GOD will pardon every one who prepareth his HEART to ſeek him at the Euchariſt, though he ſhould not be perfectly cleanſed. If the heart is rightly diſpoſed to ſeek pardon and peace, God will accept the oblation of it, notwithſtanding all its former imperfections. He will not be extreme to mark what has been done amiſs, if the ſinner feels ſorrow for what is paſt, and forms purpoſes of amendment in future. Though his

ſins

ſins have been red as ſcarlet, yet ſhall they be white as wool, when waſhed with the tears of penitence, and in the fountain of mercy that flows from the altar.

Let me then prevail on all thoſe who have hitherto neglected this holy and ſalutary ordinance, of whom there is, perhaps, a majority in moſt pariſhes, either through careleſſneſs, or too great apprehenſion of danger, let me prevail on them to lay aſide their error, and to take this holy Sacrament to their comfort at every convenient opportunity; it will preſerve their ſpiritual health unimpaired; it will renew their piety when decayed by worldly cares and habits of inattention; it will give them a pure and exalted pleaſure; it will fill them with grace in this life, and ultimately crown them with immortality.

The *neceſſity* of receiving you *muſt* allow, as we have already ſeen, if you believe in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. It *muſt* be important to your happineſs, or he would not have made it neceſſary. Evident as this concluſion muſt be to all, yet many preſerve a decent behaviour in all other religious duties, and are negligent of this alone; continually poſtponing the Communion to ſome *more convenient ſeaſon*; a ſeaſon which, conſidering the inſtability of human

human affairs, may never come, may come too late, or be entirely prevented by a ſudden and unexpected diſſolution.

Permit me to aſk, what ſeaſon more convenient for doing what we are convinced we ought to do, than the *preſent*, or the firſt occaſion that occurs? Permit me to aſk you, why you came to church this day? Nay, rather aſk your own hearts, and ſpeak the truth to yourſelves, as in the preſence of God, who knoweth the ſecrets of all hearts. Did you come from a principle of duty and the dictates of conſcience? Did you come to confeſs your dependence on God, your belief of his promiſes, your faith and truſt in the merits of a crucified Saviour? Did you come to obtain the pardon of your ſins, and the grace of God to aſſiſt you in the hour of your diſtreſs, and the ſtruggle of temptation? Were theſe the reaſons of your coming to church this day? I truſt they were the reaſons. They were good reaſons; and as they qualify you to join in the prayers of the church, they at the ſame time qualify you to receive the Sacrament, to communicate with your neighbours in Chriſtian love, and with your God in unaffected piety. If you have joined this day *ſincerely* in the prayers, while you knelt in your pew,

you

you may ſafely advance to the altar, as fit and as worthy as man, weak imperfect man, *can* be, in this his ſublunary ſtate. The poor Publican in the Goſpel, ſinner as he was, came better qualified to pray than the proud and puritanical Phariſee.

But, on the other hand, if you have *not* been ſincere, if you have *not* reſolved to amend your lives, if you are *not* ſenſible of your failings, and have *not* a firm faith in the merits of your Saivour's ſufferings and death; if you are *not* truly thankful for his mercies, if you are *not* in charity with all men—THEN, pardon me, when I aſk you, how have you been employed during the LAST HOUR? Your lips have *profeſſed* theſe things; and after all, have you mocked God, inſulted your Saviour, deceived your neighbour, and, which is worſe, *deceived yourſelves?* *Then*, indeed, you cannot come to the altar with ſafety. *Then* you muſt poſtpone it till the arrival of a more convenient ſeaſon. But let that ſeaſon be, if it is poſſible, the *earlieſt opportunity* afforded; for your ſoul is ſick, and it is dangerous to delay the medicine.

Give me leave to remind you, that a ſolemn, though a feſtive ſeaſon is at hand. A

NEW YEAR is approaching. Let us duly conſider it, and prepare to celebrate its commencement as Chriſtians. Many ſuch ſeaſons we may not live to ſee. We may never ſee another. How many of them whom we knew, has the grave ſwallowed up in the year that is juſt elapſed. Let us ſeize the moment as it paſſes, while we have health, ſenſe, and life. There *can* be no danger in communicating; but if we do it with ſincerity, there *may be* the greateſt benefit. Who would neglect ſo eaſy a ſervice, when he knows that it *can* do him no evil; but *may* ſmooth the bed of death, and ſecure everlaſting felicity.

Let all thoſe who have hitherto neglected the Holy Sacrament, as a matter which may concern their *neighbours*, but which does *not* concern *them*, go home penſively, and examine the Goſpel faithfully, and conſider fairly whether it is not TRUE, as I have already ſhewn, that CHRIST himſelf has MADE IT NECESSARY TO SALVATION. If ſo, and ſo they will indeed find it to be, let them be ALARMED. If there is truth in CHRIST JESUS, they have reaſon to be alarmed. The danger is great. Awake thou that ſleepeſt; let each ſay to his conſcience, *Awake thou that ſleepeſt, and*

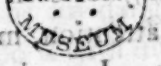
and ariſe from the dead, and Chriſt ſhall give thee light. Be it their firſt concern to prepare for the very next celebration of the Lord's Supper. This is the one thing needful; and let them lay it to heart more than all the concerns of their farm or of their merchandize.

But I am ſenſible I take up too much of your time, eſpecially as your own good diſpoſitions, evinced by your attention, may render exhortation ſuperfluous. I conclude therefore with a ſhort Prayer, ſuggeſted by my text, in which, I doubt not, you will join with cordial fervour:

" The good Lord pardon every one that " prepareth his heart to ſeek God, the Lord " God of his fathers, though he be not per- " fectly cleanſed according to the ſtricteſt pu- " rification. The Lord look mercifully on " thoſe who approach his Table, laden, indeed, " with infirmities, and ſtained with ſin; but " ſenſible of their burden, and ſorry for their " pollution. The Lord ſhower down his " grace into their hearts, that they may riſe " from their knees full of comfort, and re- " turn to the duties and employments of life " with the cheerfulneſs reſulting from a good " conſcience, with confirmed piety to Thee,

" O God,

" O God, and with enlarged charity to their
" neighbour; forgiving all that have injured
" or offended them, as they hope to be for-
" given by Thee."



THE END.